



PSC NEWS

Missouri Public Service Commission

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MORE LENIENT PAYMENT TERMS ADOPTED FOR SOME NATURAL GAS CUSTOMERS UNDER CHANGES TO COLD WEATHER RULE

Several Emergency Cold Weather Rule Changes Made Permanent

JEFFERSON CITY—The Missouri Public Service Commission has adopted a number of permanent changes to its Cold Weather Rule to assist Missouri natural gas customers faced with high heating bills. The Cold Weather Rule establishes requirements for providing utility service during the heating season.

“High natural gas prices remain a concern as consumers continue to have a difficult time paying their winter heating bills. Changes to the Cold Weather Rule are designed to help assist those natural gas customers,” said PSC Chairman Jeff Davis. “Hot temperatures today will soon be replaced with sharp winter winds and freezing temperatures. Changes we’ve enacted to the PSC Cold Weather Rule will help customers get reconnected,” Davis said.

The new provisions incorporate many of the changes made on an emergency basis last December.

Rule changes include:

- More lenient payment terms permitting reconnection of service for those natural gas customers who defaulted on a previous Cold Weather Rule payment agreement. A customer can have service restored by making an initial payment of 50% of his/her outstanding balance or \$500, whichever is less, with the deferred balance to be paid in a Cold Weather Rule payment agreement plan. In the past, a utility company could require up to 80% of the outstanding balance. The term of the payment plan will be 12 months unless the customer requests a shorter period or the utility agrees to a longer period.
- A gas utility will not be required to offer the more lenient payment terms to keep service on or to reconnect a customer under the new provisions of the rule more than once every two years or when a customer has defaulted on a Cold Weather Rule payment plan under this section three or more times. In those situations, customers would be required to pay 80% of the outstanding balance to keep service or to have service restored.
- If a customer complies with his/her Cold Weather Rule payment plan, the company must waive late payment and interest charges.
- Immediate enrollment in a budget billing plan for any customer, including those who may have arrears.
- Any customer entering into a Cold Weather Rule payment plan, who complies with the terms of the plan, will be treated, on a forward going basis, as a customer who has never defaulted on a Cold Weather Rule payment plan.

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- Any customer calling the natural gas company and indicating that he/she is having difficulty paying his/her bill, will be informed of all of his/her options.
- Natural gas companies would be allowed to collect reasonable costs associated with complying with the rule.

The Cold Weather Rule is designed to help customers with heat-related bills from November 1 through March 31 of each year. It has been a part of the Commission's rules and regulations since 1977.

In addition to the permanent changes listed above, the Cold Weather Rule also:

- Prohibits the disconnection of heat-related service when the temperature is predicted to drop below 32 degrees during the following 24 hour period.
- Prohibits the disconnection of service for registered elderly and disabled customers who meet certain income guidelines and who make a minimum payment.
- Prohibits the assessment of a new deposit or bill deposits that were previously assessed for customers who enter into a Cold Weather Rule payment agreement and the payment agreement is kept.
- Ensures that customers are given adequate notification of a proposed discontinuance of service.